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Action Learning and Leadership Development

Mary Volz-Peacock[1], Bea Carson[1,2], and Michael Marquardt[1,3]

Abstract

The Problem.

Today organizations worldwide are faced with the growing challenge of increasing the capabilities of their leaders with less time and fewer financial resources. However, most leadership development programs are ineffective and expensive and provide little focus on the social, interpersonal, and strategic aspects of leadership. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are leadership skills developed through action learning?
2. How are these skills embodied and consequently transferred to the workplace?

The Solution.

Action learning with a trained coach is a cost-effective approach that enables leaders to develop capabilities while working to solve urgent organizational or social problems. In essence, leaders are learning while working. This article reports on a model of action learning that was used with hundreds of organizations throughout the world for over a decade. It presents a number of action learning procedures to develop key leadership skills as identified by the individual and emphasizes the use of a trained coach.

The Stakeholders.

This article provides researchers and scholarly practitioners in the field of human resource development (HRD), organizational development trainers and coaches, and organizational teams, leaders, and managers with findings that support the growing importance of action learning in the field of leadership development. Other interested

[1]World Institute for Action Learning, Washington, DC, USA
[2]Carson Consultants, Annapolis, MD, USA
[3]The George Washington University, DC, USA

Corresponding Author:
Mary Volz-Peacock, World Institute for Action Learning, P.O. Box 7601 #83791, Washington, DC 20044, USA.
Email: mdvolz@comcast.net

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parties may include people who want to solve complex social problems in our world today in efforts to really make a difference.

Keywords
learning, reflection, leadership, team, action learning coach, human resource development

Action learning, since its inception in the 1940s with Reg Revans' work in the coal mines of Wales and England, has been used extensively as an effective problem-solving methodology (Boshyk & Dilworth 2010; Marquardt & Yeo, 2012; O'Neil & Marsick, 2007; Revans, 1980, 1983; Rigg & Richards, 2006). It is only more recently, however, that action learning has become a popular tool for developing leaders (Marquardt, 2011; Marquardt, Leonard, Freedman, & Hill, 2009; Pedler, 1997, 2011). "The most significant program factors leading to these outcomes were the program coach, program maturity, problem type, intended program outcome, a supportive and safe group culture, group diversity, and the group questioning process" (Cowan, 2014, p. vi).

What has caused this recent turn to action learning for leadership development? Foremost is the fact that organizations worldwide are faced with the growing challenge of increasing the capabilities of their leaders with less time and fewer financial resources. Organizations need to be able to develop their leaders while at the same time get "real" work done (Carson, 2015b). In addition, a new and wider array of skills and competencies are needed by leaders in the 21st century, including the ability to lead teams, ask insightful questions, and solve complex problems with systems thinking (Northouse, 2015). Organizations need agile, continuously learning leaders to keep ahead of the rapidly changing environment in which we live and work (Carson, 2015a).

However, most leadership development programs are ineffective and expensive (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) opine that businesses tend to focus on the "function of business more than the practice of managing" (p. 28). Typical leadership development programs provide little of the social and interpersonal aspects of the organizations and tend to focus on tactical rather than strategic leadership (Lynham, 2000).

As a result, and with increasing leadership focus on technology and globalization, organizations have turned to action learning as a timely, innovative, effective, and adaptive methodology for developing their leaders wherever they may be (Leonard & Marquardt, 2010).

The purpose of this article is to (a) describe the six components of action learning; (b) present the procedures for developing leadership skills both during and after the action learning sessions; (c) provide evidence, via a review of 139 individual reports, which exemplify how, where, and when action learning has developed leaders; (d) present conclusions and implications for human resource development (HRD) practice; and (e) identify areas for future research to further enhance action learning as a tool for developing leaders.

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What is Action Learning?

Practice and literature show many forms of action learning (Cho & Egan, 2010). From a practitioner's perspective, the authors' experience is that participants think of action leaning as outdoor experiences or action research. Action learning that is based on the original work by Reg Revans tends to show more similarities than differences.

"Action learning is a process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization. It helps organizations develop creative, flexible and successful strategies to pressing problems" (World Institute for Action Learning [WIAL], n.d.). It is a methodology "that creates dynamic opportunities for individuals, teams, leaders and organizations to successfully adapt, learn and innovate" (Marquardt, 2011, p. 2). Cowan (2014) traces the origins of action learning to Reg Revans. Pedler (1997) defined action learning as follows:

> An approach to the development of people in organizations that takes the task as the vehicle for learning. It is based on the premise that there is no learning without action and no sober and deliberate action without learning. The method has three main components: people, problems, and a set of six or so colleagues. Action learning implies both self-development and organization development. Action on a problem changes both the problem and the person acting upon it. It proceeds particularly by questioning taken-for-granted knowledge. (pp. 12-13)

McGill and Beaty (2001 provide the following definition:

> Action learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done. Through action learning individuals learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on their own experiences. (p. 11)

Edmonstone (2003) categorized action learning as a method for individual and organizational development where individuals work in teams to tackle real problems or issues, getting things done, reflecting and learning as they progress. Pedler, Burgoyne, and Brook (2005) identified action learning as a method and a culture of learning. Marquardt et al. (2009) add that action learning is a process in which

> a diverse team uses a problem-solving methodology that emphasizes asking questions to create a solution for a real problem that is both urgent and important, with an agreement from senior leaders in the organization that the solutions would be implemented if good and feasible. (p. 7)

As Boshyk (2000) suggests, "the house of action learning has many doors" (p. vii). In view of the above definitions, it is reasonable to suggest that scholars agree in the basic tenants of action learning as envisioned by Reg Revans; the differences tend to be the components that are emphasized.

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In a comparison of three action learning programs, Cowan (2014) found three salient points "(1) working on real problems; (2) for the purposes of participant learning; (3) and organizational solutions" (p. 16). Cowan goes on to confirm what Capon and Kuhn (2004) found—that is that these three points distinguish action learning from outdoor experiential activities, role-playing, and simulations.

Other action learning scholars and practitioners (Boshyk & Dilworth, 2010; Coghlan & Coughlan, 2006; Leonard & Freedman, 2013; Pedler, 1997, 2011) suggest six major elements, with each emphasizing different components. Marquardt (2011) labeled them as follows: (a) a problem, challenge, or task; (b) a group of four to eight members; (c) a questioning and reflective process; (d) development of strategies and action; (e) a commitment to three levels of learning; and (f) a coach, facilitator, or advisor. Each of these components must be integrated to attain the full power of action learning, especially for the development of leaders. Revans (1982) did not condone the team having a learning coach. In contrast, O'Neil and Marsick (2014) indicate, "many successful action learning programs use action learning coaches to help facilitate the learning that can occur within such programs" (p. 202).

A brief description of the six components as defined by Marquardt (2011) follows.

The Problem/Challenge/Task

The organizational problem or challenge is the beginning point for deciding to establish an action learning team, and may be identified by an individual, team, or leader within an organization. It is critical that the problem, whoever identifies it, meets the following criteria: (a) important, (b) urgent, (c) feasible, (d) familiar to the team, (e) significant, and (f) present a real learning opportunity (Marquardt, 2011). In addition, the problem owner must not have a solution in mind but rather be open to breakthrough solutions recommended by the team that is beyond his/her current thinking. This openness empowers the group and gives them the authority to creatively solve the problem and implement the solution, not just implement a preconceived solution.

Group/Team/Set

The action learning team, or "set "as it is sometimes called, is the core of the action learning methodology (Marquardt, 2011). The team, comprising four to eight participants from across various departments and levels of the organization and/or community, draws upon different perspectives and gains appreciation for diversity of thought. Weick (1995) contends that we need "requisite variety" in teams so they can truly understand the complex environment around them. Building upon this thinking, Marquardt (2011) suggests that people presenting different perspectives "challenge our mind-sets and assumptions" (p. 51).

Questioning and Reflective Process

Marquardt (2004) states that "one of the primary ways in which action learning differs from other problem solving approaches is by focusing on questions rather than on

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solutions" (p. 69). One of the ground rules with this methodology is "statements should only be made in response to questions" (p. 8). Through questioning, a team is able to (a) gain knowledge so they can fully understand the whole problem not just a part or a symptom; (b) learn from each other; and (c) simultaneously identify the strengths of members, think about possible strategies, and suggest innovative solutions.

Reflection, on the other hand, provides the silent or quiet time that is needed to recall and think about our assumptions, prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs to dissect and make sense of it. Marquardt (2011, p. 85) suggests that "reflective inquiry challenges one's programmed knowledge," or what is referred to by Schein (1997) as theories in use. Reflection allows us to think about, reexamine, and critique our programmed or prior knowledge, experiences, assumptions, and beliefs to experience new learning.

Kotter (1998) and Kouzes and Posner (2002) contend that reflection is a key factor in leadership development as it enables leaders to know themselves better. Throughout questioning and reflective inquiry, leaders can challenge their "programmed (or prior) knowledge" by engaging in conversation that helps them suspend judgment and together as a collective team explore diverse perspectives, see the whole versus parts of a system, and then together develop shared meaning and innovative solutions. During the action learning sets, asking questions instead of making statements steers participants to deeply explore what is unknown rather than holding on to their perhaps rigid prior beliefs.

Strategies and Action

Developing strategies and taking action allow leaders to explore the whole through systems thinking and not just treat symptoms or part of a problem. "Systems thinking recognizes that what affects one part of an organization affects other parts in planned and unplanned ways with sometimes surprising and unpredictable consequences" (Marquardt, 2011, pp. 93-94). A diverse team working on a problem while asking insightful questions and reflecting upon responses enables a more holistic strategy for a solution that will be helpful to the entire organization, not just one division or office. It is critical for a leader today to have strong competencies associated with systems and strategic thinking at all levels of the organization so that they are able to see the big picture and how one part of an organization impacts the other (Mellon & Kroth, 2013; Shirey, 2012).

Therefore, it is critical that leaders take action both during and between team meetings, as well as implementing the strategy, both to yield the result of the project but most importantly for significant learning to occur among participants. If actions are not taken by leaders, there is no way to know if in fact development has taken place in the action learning team.

Commitment to Three Levels of Learning

"The power and attractiveness of action learning lie in action learning's ability to increase and expand the knowledge of an organization at the same time that it is

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solving critical, urgent and complex problems" (Marquardt, 2011, p. 114). As a result, multiple benefits of action learning are achieved simultaneously including the problem is solved, the team learns how they work most effectively together, and each member develops as a leader (Carson, 2015b).

There are three levels of learning—individual/leader, team, and organizational—and action learning focuses on all three. Within the action learning problem-solving session, leaders focus on learning *individual* skills that build competencies, not only associated with solving the urgent problem but also those related to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000), leading people both effectively and with empathy. In each meeting, leaders identify critical leadership skills they wish to develop or enhance, and demonstrate those skills throughout the meeting. Time is then allotted for each leader to receive feedback on how well they demonstrated the identified leadership skill and what they could do better.

Team learning occurs throughout the action learning process. Teams learn quickly how to work together toward a common goal, develop strategies, ask questions, reflect, respect others and their ideas, build trust and cohesiveness (Marquardt, 2004, p. 123), and learn new knowledge related to the problem itself. In each team meeting, the participants discuss what the team has done well and what it could do better going forward.

Organizational learning necessary to build a learning organization occurs through four components: increased learning skills and capacity; transformed organizational culture and structure; involvement of the entire business chain in the learning process; and enhanced capability to manage knowledge (Marquardt, 2002). The four components are enhanced by the planned and actual transfer of the learned leadership and team skills to respective organizations along with follow up, dialogue upon reflection and feedback.

Coach/Facilitator

The coach is the catalyst for assuring that learning occurs in the action learning process. The coach holds a very special role as a team participant; however, he/she is not engaged in problem solving but rather has a very important focus on the group process and learning. The responsibilities of the coach include setting the tone, developing competencies, improving team performance, ensuring reflection, managing time, and identifying learnings (WIAL, 2014). The coaching role enables a team to build a learning climate; create openness, trust, and critical thinking; encourage teamwork; enhance listening, questioning, and reflection; and stress the importance of actions to support the team and the three levels of learning making certified coach-facilitated action learning more effective for the development of leadership skills.

Action Learning Coach for Leadership Development

In 2005, several leading action learning scholar-practitioners joined forces to create a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of action learning and

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expanding its application to every type of organization in every part of the world. An essential and critical element of the model is the role and work of the action learning coach, who, in addition to enabling the group to solve a complex problem and to build a high-performing team, is tasked to enable and assure the development of the leadership competency of each team member at every action learning session. Rao (2014) maintains the need for coaching to support continual learning and feedback that is needed to develop leaders.

Every leadership skill can be developed in an action learning session as individuals are working with a group of people on a problem for which there is no known solution. The inclusion of a skilled action learning coach with specific leadership development responsibilities would assure that all four elements of skill development (important to the person, opportunity to practice, feedback from others, and self-reflection) would become part of each action learning session. To incorporate each of these four elements, the action learning coach does the following:

1. Prior to the group beginning its work of solving the problem, the action learning coach asks each group member to identify the leadership skill that they will work on during this action learning session. These leadership skills are put on a flip chart so that everyone can see who is working on which leadership skill.
2. The coach then tells the group that at the end of the session she will (a) ask each person howshe did on the skill she identified and (b) ask other group members to provide examples on how that person demonstrated the skill (note that the coach uses positive inquiry and thus only asks for positive examples).
3. During the action learning session, the coach may intervene whenever she sees an opportunity to help members develop their leadership skill, ask the impact of that skill on the group and problem-solving process, or provide evidence of the practice of that skill.
4. At the end of the session, each person reflects on how she has demonstrated the leadership skill, and receives evidence from others as to how she has done so.

To further develop and practice the identified leadership skills, group members are informed that at the beginning of the next session, the action learning coach will be asking them for a practical example of the leadership skill in their organization and the impact of using that skill. Thus, leadership development occurs not only during the action learning session, but also between each session.

It should be noted, the model suggested here not only emphasizes the role of the coach in helping the group members develop their leadership skills, but the coach also serves as a leadership role model throughout by demonstrating good listening and questioning skills.

Methods

The results of our research were determined from analyzing data of coach-facilitated case studies submitted by coaches over the past 10 years as part of a coaching

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certification process conducted by the WIAL, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of action learning.

Participants

For this study, we collected case study reports from 139 action learning coaches, some representing a single action learning session, others representing two or more. These represented case studies from 33 countries: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea (south), Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Vietnam. The cases studies represented over 200 action learning sessions with more than 400 mentions of leadership skills being developed.

Procedures

Case study documents all followed the following format:

- Introducing Action Learning
- Action Learning project(s) Description
- Learnings
- Reflections about your team (Team Learnings)
- Reflections (Personal Learnings)

Each case study was written immediately after the completion of their respective action learning sessions.

Analysis

The methodology for the study was a generic qualitative inquiry design (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). The researchers read the individual reports. Data analysis followed a case study triangulated research approach. Triangulation is needed to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study and to identify potential alternate explanations. Triangulation includes protocols (data, investigators, or theories) that confirm accuracy and look for alternative explanations. In case studies, this could be done by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984). The problem in case studies is to establish meaning rather than location. However, as the case studies came from the world over, location does not even enter the analysis.

Norman Denzin (As cited in Tellis, 1997) described four types of triangulation:

> Data source triangulation, when the researcher looks for the data to remain the same in different contexts; Investigator triangulation, when several investigators examine the same phenomenon; Theory triangulation, when investigators with different viewpoints

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> interpret the same results; and Methodological triangulation, when one approach is followed by another, to increase confidence in the interpretation. (p. 4)

For the purpose of this study, the first of these was utilized, data source triangulation of case studies. The case studies represented a variety of organizations from within for profit and not for profit organizations, as well as government agencies, non-government agencies, organizations with only a handful of employees to organizations with tens of thousands of employees, and representing 33 different countries on six continents.

Data analysis followed the methodological procedures described by Moustakas (1994), Patton (2002), and Creswell (2013), which seeks to uncover the meaningful factors of an experience through a reductive thematic analysis. All leadership related quotes were captured through thorough review of each of the papers, generating a list of themes. Once all quotes were identified and assigned to a theme the process was repeated, moving quotes to themes that emerge with multiple reviews. This reductive thematic analysis sought to uncover the meaningful factors of the experience.

This manual process was exhaustive but allowed the researchers an opportunity to do a cross-analysis of the data gathered from numerous case studies over the years and identify similarities. Through this analysis, common themes emerged from the data that lead to the findings in this article.

Results

This review identified more than 100 instances where the skills practiced in the action learning session were transferred to the workplace.

Five key themes that emerged are elaborated in the following sections.

1. Participants appreciated the safe environment that they could practice their chosen leadership skills.

Coaches noted how action learning had enabled the group members "to ask questions and express leadership competencies, which they could use to inspire subordinates, enhance team collaboration, and solve problems." Other coaches wrote how the action learning method enabled the participants to have greater "awareness of leadership from the very beginning" and the ease of putting the leadership "principles into practice."

In another comment, one coach suggested "It is a down-to-earth way to help participants be authentic leaders who could raise self-awareness, lead from the heart, and practice leadership competencies." Other comments by coaches included how action learning "propels the development of leadership skills."

By means of continuous questioning, another coach found that "abilities of attentively listening, systematically thinking, self-examine and problem solving are cultivated." Yet another coach found that team members "learned to consciously practice and acquire new leadership skills."

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One coach reported how a group member initially told the team that she did not believe how leadership could be developed in a single action learning session. However, she witnessed the change in herself "with the power of setting the right intention, asking questions clearly, and giving feedback at the end of the session." The group member proclaimed how she had learned to trust action learning as a great tool for individual and team development, a testimony that was "uplifting to the whole team." Yeadon-Lee (2013) research supports the safety felt in action learning sessions, a safety that is felt both psychologically and physically.

2. Team members saw how easy it was to practice their chosen leadership skill and appreciated the real-time feedback.

Action learning provides a real-time experimental environment for participants to apply and practice leadership skills through questioning and listening. "It is much easier to learn leadership skills through the exercise of action learning," commented one leader to her coach. Action learning, noted one of the coaches, "provides the avenue for them to apply the knowledge to solve real business problems in a collaborative manner." Team members commented to their coach how any individual leadership skills "can be improved in a short time (even in only one day)." Others recognized the power of how the action learning coach in helping each person "sum up and evaluate the individual leadership competences."

Action learning coaches indicate that participants were amazed that, as one coach wrote, "comparing the assessment of the team members' capabilities and quality between before and after the action learning, it can be clearly seen that their leadership capabilities have improved." Leadership skills were developed by "demonstrating it right away through practicing the specific skill in a safe environment and receive feedback from other members."

Coaches also indicated that corporate leaders expressed that management trainings for frontline managers was often conducted in class room environment detaching from the realities of branch environment, which made it difficult for them to transfer new learning into real practices when back to work. However, they were "amazed at how action learning can develop people's leadership skills so quickly." Rao (2014) identifies the coach as being instrumental in this feedback loop that accelerates the individual development of competencies.

3. Team members transferred the newly practiced skills to their organizations.

In many of the case studies, the coaches noted how group members were excited about not only what they had learned, but how quickly and appropriately they could "take away the skills from the session both for personal improvement and improvement of the organization by applying it to their jobs." Particularly valuable was the leadership skill of "asking powerful questions in their repertoire of navigating through their careers." They could see how these leadership skills of listening, patience, empathy "could be utilized to develop subordinates and influence peers.

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Action learning coaches indicated that group members saw that the competencies and behaviors in action learning were transferable throughout the organization. Whereas, the greater and long-term value of action learning for the company is the application of new learning on a system-wide basis throughout the organization and the participants' professional living. Coaches commented on how "many members of the teams worked with began using leadership and team skills and processes learned in the action learning teams for other internal teamwork." The participants "understood the power of giving constructive leadership-based feedback which could help them become true leaders and grow more leaders." Jackson and Thurgate (2011) found action learning achieves learning at all three levels—individual, team, and organization. Nilson (1999) attributes the transfer skills to the trust and interpersonal knowledge that develops during the sessions, making it easy to continue to demonstrate the skill.

4. The development of leadership skills is a natural outcome of action learning.

Coaches reported in their case studies how the participants "felt empowered and would in turn encourage their subordinates instead of giving criticism only." One stated that action learning has "changed how I lead my team, and I love it." Most of the participants were excited about how "remarkable action learning is designed for leadership skill development." The participants say how action learning could be "a great complement to an overall leadership development package of the organization."

Coaches further commented that participant's saw how action learning provided them "a forum for leaders to become self-aware of their competencies and how they might choose to use their skills with organizational issues." Other participants were amazed at how much easier to learn leadership skills through the exercise of action learning "than the leadership programs she had conducted as a trainer for over 15 years, which took so much time to design and required much effort in advance." Davis et al. (2012) found that action learning fostered an environment for the supportive development of collaborative leaders.

5. The organization learned that creating breakthrough strategies could be achieved while developing leadership skills.

The coaches recognized that action learning was not only "a cost-effective means of training leaders, it generated breakthrough solutions to real and urgent challenges the organization is facing." They noted action learning was "a powerful tool for both problem solving and leadership development." And how "action learning has the amazing capacity to simultaneously and effectively enable organizations to solve complex and urgent problems, develop skilled leaders, quickly build high-performing teams, and transform corporate culture and create learning organizations." Action learning could also "create a new mindset in the organization that (effective) learning actually occurs outside of the training room." It is "simple to implement but effective in problem solving and leadership developing." Action learning was truly an example of the way

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companies could "provide leadership development for leaders who do not have many opportunities to come together to learn." Action learning achieves breakthrough solutions while developing the leadership and team skills of the participants (Carson, 2015b).

Study Limitations

The first limitation is the data are reported by the action learning coach and his/her recollection of what team members and senior leaders may have reported. It is possible that the coach may have erroneously recalled some information and/or that participants were selective in what they reported about their individual subjective experience.

The second limitation relates to the case studies being collected as part of a broader coaching certification process. Even though coaches were encouraged to report the challenges and subsequent learnings, it is possible that the coaches may have perceived an incentive to document the action learning session as more impactful or successful than it may have been; thus, there may have been a positive bias present in the case studies (Lam & Bengo, 2003).

The third limitation is researcher bias. All three of the authors acknowledge genuine interest in action learning and leadership development, specifically as it relates to our experiences as action learning coaches. Our favorable experiences with action learning and leadership development could potentially lead to some researcher bias. Therefore, in this study, we practiced "epoché" as suggested by Moustakas (1994) whereby one "sets aside prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas about things" and tries to view the data as though hearing or looking at it for the first time. In addition to practicing epoché, the use of multiple case studies and triangulation of the data were designed to help prevent researcher bias as well.

Conclusions and Implications for HRD Practice

The most significant conclusions drawn from the examination of these 139 reports are (a) action learning provides a safe, social, and collaborative environment for developing leaders around the world in public and private sectors; (b) action learning enables participants the opportunity to practice leadership skills, gain immediate feedback, and easily transfer skills to the workplace; and (c) action learning is simple to implement, and focuses on learning while working on breakthrough problem solving and leadership development.

Based on the findings, there are significant implications for practice in the field of human resources development for using the coach-facilitated methodology in leadership development programs. Several outcomes are provided below:

1. Leaders practice skills in action learning sessions, and receive immediate feedback so they are able to see immediate benefit of the new behavior.

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2. Leadership skills learned by participants through action learning are transferable to the workplace. Leadership skills learned by participants are demonstrated between sessions in the workplace thereby integrating the learned skills into their personal leadership style so becomes a natural part of the participant's new way of being.
3. Leaders who model the action learning methodology in the workplace have the capacity to solve urgent problems, develop other leaders, build high-performing teams and learning organizations, and transform culture.
4. Action learning provides deep, transferable learning. Integrating action learning into a long-term leadership development program has advantages.
5. Leaders are working on organizational problems while learning problem solving, team, and leadership skills.
6. The organization further benefits by solving long-standing problems with creative solutions.

Implications for Research

Based on the findings of this study, future research should be undertaken to provide additional empirical evidence that the coach-facilitated methodology is an effective method for developing leaders. The opportunity for future research is boundless. Three potential studies are mentioned here: (a) A mixed methodology including quantitative and qualitative measures of leadership skills pre- and post action learning sessions could be conducted that would evaluate the amount of learning gained and transferred to the workplace. (b) Although not specifically mentioned in the findings, the researchers noticed what appears to be a correlation between leadership development and the skills of the action learning coach. Thus, there could be a mixed method study to determine if in fact there is a correlation. An instrument for coaches could be used to evaluate the coach's ability. The coach's evaluation could then be used in comparison to pre- and post action learning sessions' leadership assessment scores. (c) Additional research could be conducted to determine if there is correlation and/or saturation of the development of leadership skills and the number of sessions attended by participants.

Human resources professionals globally are continuously looking for innovative methods for developing employees and specifically leaders, meeting competency development needs, and building organizational capacity now and for the future. And, to do so in a cost-effective manner that makes a meaningful difference for the organization is critical for HRD professionals. The action learning coach-facilitated methodology has been demonstrated to be an effective approach being used globally to develop leaders while they work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Author Biographies

Mary Volz-Peacock is a public sector manager with leadership responsibilities including strategic thinking, transparency, human resource development, organizational change, and learning. She has a doctor of education in human and organizational learning, the George Washington University, and is a WIAL-certified action learning coach as well as serves on the WIAL Research and Publication Committee. Her research interests are action learning, organizational learning, leadership, teams, and values.

Bea Carson is a master action learning coach (MALC) and the president of Carson Consultants. She is president elect and director of International Affiliates for the World Institute for action learning. She is a visiting scholar at American University and the George Washington University. She has consulted with government, not-for-profit, and commercial organizations throughout the United States including Microsoft, Target, Constellation Energy, Wells Fargo, NASA, Rotary International, and Special Olympics Maryland. She is the immediate past president of the Annapolis Rotary Club, and Area Governor Elect for Rotary District 7620.

Michael Marquardt is professor of human and organizational learning at George Washington University where he directs the executive leadership doctoral program as well as the Certificate Program for Global Leadership in Teams and Organizations. He is the president of the World Institute for action learning as well as a MALC. His research interests are action learning, global leadership, organizational learning, and team dynamics.

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